

copy

September 20, 2010

Honorable Michael Nash
Edmund D. Edelman Children's Court
201 Centre Plaza Drive
Department 400
Monterey Park, CA 91754

Honorable Judge Nash,

In the twenty years Serenity Infant Care Homes has contracted with Los Angeles County as a Foster Family Agency, I, as a Co-Founder, have been involved with hundreds of cases which go before judges in the Children's Court. On occasion, I have not agreed with the outcomes, but have respected the process. I can no longer remain silent, as the recent decision to return a non-verbal child to the biological parents has prompted this letter of grave concern.

The purpose of this letter is two-fold. First, I am asking you to review the history and outcome regarding a little girl named **Vyctorya Sandoval (DOB 03/06/2009), Case #CK75993, JAIN:2159064, Attorney: Robert Vasquez (bar#212733)**. Vyctorya is child number 9 of **Jennifer Dalhover**. She does not have custody of her eight other children. Vyctorya came into the system as a newborn, and, at the 18 month hearing, was released by **Commissioner M. Mackel** on September 1, 2010.

There has been extensive documentation of our concerns (see attached final letter of concern by Social Work Supervisor Holly Stabile to Attorney Vasquez). The history of the biological parents involves domestic violence, child abuse, sexual abuse charges (against Ms. Dalhover, age 36, by the mother of Vyctorya's biological father, **Joseph Sandoval**, age 17 at the time of Vyctorya's birth) and a restraining order filed by Ms. Dalhover against Mr. Sandoval for physical abuse. The biological parents had separate visitation because of the restraining order **before they disappeared in April 2010** for several months. They were then found living together at a shelter in Pasadena with their

newborn daughter. They were allowed to resume visitation **together** at the end of June, and **without completing the court-ordered programs, 77 days later Vytorya was returned to their custody.**

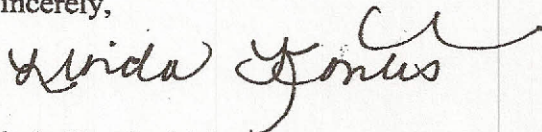
My concerns are many. There was no post reunification oversight ordered nor was Family Preservation suggested. I was told by Attorney Vasquez outside the courtroom that "the history of the family does not matter, the goal is to reunify". I know that reunification is primary and always work toward that goal, however, there are cases where common sense must prevail and history is relevant.

My secondary concern regards the courtroom itself. I, as one of the Founders and Directors of Serenity, have been in many children's courtrooms over the last 20 years, and I have **never** seen any conducted in the manner in which I witnessed that day. Commissioner Makel dominated her courtroom with intimidation and anger, to the point that the attorneys present barely spoke above a whisper with simple answers. One substitute attorney started to speak and was chastised by Commissioner Makel to "never ever even attempt to speak when I speak". Three teenage siblings of Vytorya were at the witness table and when she asked them about what they liked to do, one started to answer and Commissioner Makel turned away from her to berate the court attendant. No one spoke on behalf of Vytorya. No one acknowledged the reams of concerns and pages of documentation over the last years. **Vytorya, age 17 1/2 months had no voice in Commissioner Makel's courtroom.**

I ask only that you review Vytorya Sandoval's file from beginning to end. If you need any additional information please feel free to contact me at any time at [REDACTED]

Thank you, sir, in advance, for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Linda Kontis".

Linda Kontis, M.S.
Director of Children's Placements
Serenity Co-Founder